

An Activity Book For African American Families: Helping Children Cope with Crisis



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Institutes of Health

Dear Friends:

The Activity Book for African American Families was developed by the National Black Child Development Institute and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, in collaboration with other organizations serving the African American community. The tragic events of September 11, 2001, demonstrated the ongoing need to provide materials for parents to help their children cope with extraordinary crises, such as a terrorist attack. These crises receive extensive media coverage, and while adults may understand what they see and hear and can place things in context, children often cannot. Helping families face everyday hardships, such as crime and poverty, can also enhance the strength and togetherness that is necessary during times of major crisis.

We brought together leaders of national African American organizations as well as health professionals to identify information and strategies that would be meaningful to families coping with crisis. We also consulted parents about their concerns and received input on tools they would find useful. We have been impressed by the responses that affirmed the need for this Activity Book.

This collaboration arises from a commitment to share the best knowledge that we have with the American people. It represents the kind of public-private partnership that uses the strengths of all partners to improve the lives of our children. We would like to express our appreciation to the many people who contributed to this effort.

We also thank you for joining this partnership. We believe that your connections to the children in your life will be enriched by the activities in this book.

Sincerely,



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Helping Children Cope with Crisis

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National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
National Black Child Development Institute, Inc.

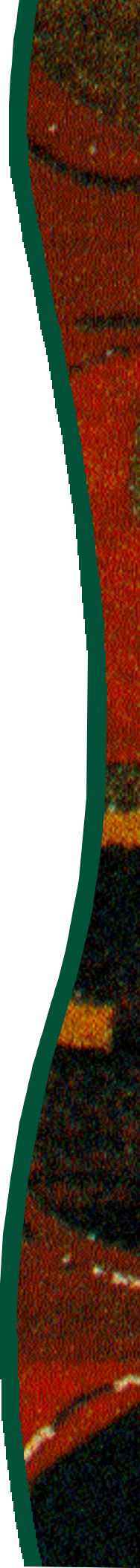


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**The first activity in each section is most likely to work well with the youngest children. If children find the poem is too long or confusing, the parent may skip reading the poem aloud.*

Introduction


Why do I need this activity book?

Every day, we see images of stress, hardship, and violence. These images come into our homes in many ways: through television, newspapers, radio reports, and magazines. What we see are more than just pictures of things that happen to other people—we feel and see the effects all around us. We see news updates on fighting and conflict; we go through increased security at buildings and airports; we feel the tensions directed at certain religious communities and ethnic groups; we hear about or experience job losses. African American communities are faced with violence, insecurity, and unemployment every day. Events around the world only add to these everyday stresses. All of these things have a great impact on our lives.

They have an even greater impact on our children.

Even if our children don't say it, they are affected by the world around them. They may be afraid that something "bad" will





happen without warning. They may fear for our safety as we go to work, or go to the store. They may not want to be away from us, or to be by themselves. Most importantly, they may never tell us that they are scared or confused.

When our children have a cut or a bruise, we know that we can respond with a bandage or an ice pack. But, if our children are scared or angry or insecure, it's harder to know what to do. We may not be able to make everything better.

Many of us are looking for ways to help our children cope with the fears and uncertainties that are a natural part of our world and its many crisis situations.

The **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)** and the **National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)** are working together with families, professional organizations, and leaders of national African American organizations to provide families in African American communities with the information and resources they need to comfort their children. This activity guide is part of that collaboration.

**In addition to the NICHD and NBCDI,
the following groups are also involved
in this collaboration:**

100 Black Men of America, Inc.
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Psychiatric Association
Congress of National Black Churches, Inc.
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
Jack and Jill of America, Inc.
National Association of Black Social Workers
National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc.
National Medical Association

What are the ways I can help my child cope with crisis?

This guidebook is designed to help you and your family find different ways to help your children cope with crisis. These methods, which work well with children ages 12 and under, include the following:

- ✓ Inspire hope in your child.
- ✓ Be still and listen to your child.
- ✓ Support, comfort, and love your child.
- ✓ Give your child information that is age-appropriate.
- ✓ Help your child feel safe.
- ✓ Make a plan with your child for emergencies.
- ✓ Help your child feel good about himself.
- ✓ Pay attention to what your child watches on TV.
- ✓ Share your faith with your child.
- ✓ Identify signs of stress in your child.

By putting these ideas into practice, the activities in this booklet can help you to communicate with your child and to strengthen your family, so that children know they are safe.

What kinds of activities are included in the booklet?

The book's activities are designed to help you talk with your child about emotions—to find ways to express thoughts and feelings that might be hard to say out loud. By talking about these things, you and your family can begin to deal with feelings in positive, constructive ways. The activities also highlight important values, such as family, honesty, and spirituality, that can strengthen your child from within.





Many of the activities try to tap into your child's creativity—drawing, coloring, singing, gardening. These types of tasks encourage children to let others know what's going on inside them in a safe, controlled way. Other activities encourage your child to use what's inside to understand something—like reading a poem or a story, or listening to a song.

As you do these activities, remember that the main goal is to get your child to communicate with you. When you finish an activity, you'll have something you can touch or see, but that's not what is most important. Talking and listening are the real goals of these activities.

Most of all, the activities give you the chance to be with your child and to learn about your child. And, you may learn *from* your child in the process.


How do I use this book?

What is involved in each activity?

Each section includes the following parts:

- ✓ **Section heading**—Lists one thing you can do to help your child. Information about some general ways to include these things in your day appears underneath the heading.
- ✓ **Why are these activities important?**
Explains the goals and purposes of the activities within the section.
- ✓ **Affirmation**—Is drawn from African and African American quotations and proverbs. There is no right or wrong interpretation of the meaning. But, these sayings can give you something to think about while doing the activity.
- ✓ **Activity**—Focuses on a poem, an art project, a song or music, or a craft. These activities can help children express feelings that may be hard to say out loud. If your child doesn't like these activities, use another activity your child does like to reach the same goals. Each activity includes:
 - ◆ **What you need**—Is a list of things you can use to do the activity. These items are only suggested materials; you can still do the activity without these exact items. The activities use things supplied in this book, or things that people have in their homes already, so you don't have to buy new things.



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- ◆ **Description**—Provides some background on the activity. If, when you're reading this description, you think of an activity that would be better for your child, then go ahead and use it.
 - ◆ **Steps for doing the activity**—Describes each step for completing an activity with your child. Do only those steps you feel are right for your child.
 - ✓ **Things to Remember**—Includes important things to keep in mind while doing the activities.
 - ✓ **Note to Parents**—Offers some important facts or information that you can use during the activity or to get more information about a certain topic.
 - ✓ **Did you know?**—Provides facts and additional information about a topic included in an activity or description.

How do I do these activities?

You can do the activities in a family group with children of different ages; or you can do them during quiet time with just you and your child. Within each section:

- ✓ The activities that appear first are best for younger children and include things that most children can do and enjoy.
- ✓ The later activities are better for more mature children, including those who can read and write easily, and those who are comfortable being creative.

As you do the activities, try not to disapprove of or be negative about how well your child completes each task. Sometimes, when parents make comments, children turn off and tune out. There is no best way to do these activities. Let your child take the lead and guide you through the activity.

Are these activities right for my child?

These activities are appropriate for both boys and girls. Your child's interests should determine your approach to the activities.

Children have different talents, interests, and gifts, and these qualities can change based on a child's age. For this reason, the activities are designed so that you can easily change them to fit your child's age, interests, and talents. You can also use these activities as a starting point for ideas from your child or your family. Please adapt the activities for children with special needs. Do what works best with your children and your family.

Is my child too old or too young for these activities?

This book doesn't give strict guidelines for the activities because, no matter what their age, children have many different gifts, talents, and interests. But, as you plan to do each activity with your child, you may want to think about how your child is changing and developing. The information below describes some general qualities* of children at different ages. You may notice some of your child's qualities in these lists.

Young school-aged children (ages 5 to 7):

- ✓ Enjoy arts and crafts
- ✓ Can draw and use scissors with effort (keep the time short)
- ✓ Like the support of adults
- ✓ Can be shy and worry
- ✓ Hold bold ideas and fantasies
- ✓ May not have words or labels for feelings

REMEMBER

The text in this book takes turns using he/his, she/hers, and other male-female pronouns. Even if the text says *he*, you can still do the activity with your daughter; or, even if the text says to help your child do something *herself*, you can still have your son do the activity.

*Adapted from:
Playground Politics: Understanding the Emotional Life of Your School-Age Child, Stanley Greenspan, M.D., Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. 1993. And *A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child: Birth to Sixteen*, David Elkind, Allyn and Bacon, 1974.

Middle school-aged children (ages 8 to 10):

- ✓ Enjoy a variety of arts and crafts
- ✓ Are more interested in the process than the results
- ✓ Are beginning to use words for emotions
- ✓ Can organize ideas about emotions

Older school-aged children (ages 11 to 12):

- ✓ Have adult-like abilities in arts and crafts
- ✓ Have words for emotions
- ✓ Use sarcasm in their communication
- ✓ Understand and empathize with the feelings of others

Many children, including those with special needs, may have qualities that are listed in all three age groups. Or, they may have features that aren't listed. Do what works best for your child's developmental stage.

What should I do during the activities?

For these activities to be most helpful, you need to be still and listen to your child. Make sure your child has your complete attention. When doing these activities, stop doing chores, talking on the phone, or watching television. You need to be an *active* listener.

When your child is talking, you can be an active listener* by:

- ✓ Sitting on a chair or on the floor to be close to your child's height
- ✓ Relaxing your face and body
- ✓ Not tapping fingers or frowning
- ✓ Responding with a nod or by saying "Mm Hmm"
- ✓ Making eye contact
- ✓ Waiting for your child to finish—not interrupting
- ✓ Asking questions that can't be answered with just a yes or no
- ✓ Saying back to the child part of his or her point

*Adapted from:
Different and Wonderful: Raising Black Children in a Race-Conscious Society, Darlene Hopson, Ph.D. and Derek Hopson, Ph.D. Prentice Hall Press 1990.

By creating healthy ways for your child to talk about feelings and to express what's inside, you may find out things that trouble you. The ***Just for Parents*** section at the back of this book offers some ways to help your child and where to go for help when you think your child's feelings are more than you can handle alone.

Some things to remember while doing these activities:

- ✓ **Take time to plan each activity before you do it.** Make sure to set aside time to do the activity with your child. You may decide to not answer the phone or to keep the TV off while doing the activities.
- ✓ **Make it fun!** These activities aren't meant to be homework. They are a way to get to know your child. So don't force the activity on your child.
- ✓ **Choose arts and crafts or activities that your child likes.**
- ✓ **Pay attention to your child's reactions and comments during the activities.** Your child may give you hints about other activities that would be more enjoyable.
- ✓ **Talk to your child about the activity when you are finished.** These activities are supposed to increase communication between you and your child. So talk to your child about how the activity made him feel, or what she liked about an activity. Use the activity as a way to get to know your child.
- ✓ **Take care to be positive in your comments.** Use these activities as a way to start being more positive in what you say to your child.
- ✓ **Let your child tell you about the finished product and share it with others.** Help your child take pride in what she has accomplished.
- ✓ **Praise your child's efforts, even if it doesn't come out exactly like you think it should.** And even if it doesn't turn out like he wanted it to.
- ✓ **Doing the activity together is what makes it special.**



